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Tetsu Akiyama, *The Qïrghïz Baatïr and the Russian Empire: A Portrait of a Local Intermediary in Russian Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 144 pp.

This book is both a biography and a study of social and political changes brought about by the conquest and incorporation of the nomadic region of Semirech'e into the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century. Centered on the figure of Shabdan Jantaev, an influential Qïrghïz (Kyrgyz) *manap*, or tribal chieftain, the author makes a number of important interventions into current discussions of Russian imperial rule in the borderlands and the fate of individuals and communities who found themselves under this rule.

Spanning six tight chapters and an epilogue, the book follows the rise of Shabdan as an intermediary, first with the Kokand Khanate and later with imperial Russia, and ends with the Central Asian uprising of 1916, which split his family and signaled the end of the old order. The introductory chapters follow Shabdan's coming of age in the context of inter-tribal strife and competition following the collapse of the Dzungar Khanate in the mid-eighteenth century. Distinguishing himself in raids against unfriendly tribes, Shabdan gained the title of *baatir* (hero) and came to enjoy popularity and respect beyond his native tribe. Shabdan's prominence helped him secure the position of an intermediary with the Kokand Khanate. Soon, however, the growing Russian encroachment into the region compelled Shabdan to switch loyalties.

As Akiyama explains, Russia's conquest of the region was facilitated by individuals like Shabdan, whose talents and "warlike inclination" were useful in military campaigns against the Kokand Khanate. Shabdan's military service to Russia was amply rewarded with land and titles. On the other hand, the ban on *baranta*—raids designed to inflict damage on the enemy as well as to prove one's bravery and leadership qualities—made *manaps*' authority unstable and dependent on the colonial authorities. To shore up his influence among the Kyrgyz, Shabdan turned to Islam, making a hajj to Mecca and building a mosque.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, Shabdan's relationship with the imperial government soured. His requests for "hereditary nobility" status for himself and his sons were denied. The arrival of settlers from European Russia and the establishment of the Resettlement Administration, whose officials took a dim view of *manaps*, caused the family's fortunes to wane further. Worse still, Shabdan's health deteriorated following the arrest of one of his sons for murder in 1911. The death of Shabdan a year later effectively ended his sons' bid for dominance in local affairs. The massive native revolt in the summer of 1916 sealed the fate of the family, which split into leaders and opponents of the uprising.

Akiyama's book sits comfortably with recent publications on Russian imperial rule, which suggest that local actors had a considerable degree of agency. He ably portrays a cunning leader and a capable actor that the colonial government at once made use of and was forced to reckon with. Yet some of Akiyama's conclusions offer a correction to some of the established views in the discipline. For example, Akiyama demonstrates that, far from pursuing a policy of non-intervention, the imperial authorities sought to "penetrate deep into the Qïrghïz society" once they established firm control of the region in the 1880s. No longer dependent on *manaps* to govern their tribesmen, the colonial authorities came to see *manaps* as an undesirable presence and an impediment to the settlement of nomadic Kyrgyz. To eliminate *manaps*, Semirech'e officials

engaged in social engineering of sorts by exiling or resettling *manaps* they deemed untrustworthy, in a policy that foreshadowed the Soviet anti-*manap* campaign. In fact, what emerges clearly from the book is that much of the Soviet thinking about *manaps* was hardly new and reflected the views of the imperial Resettlement Administration, which resented *manaps* as social parasites and feudal lords. In a striking parallel to the later Soviet attempts to instigate class struggle in the Kyrgyz aul, some colonial officials encouraged Kyrgyz to petition against *manaps* and collected data on illegal tax collection by *manaps* for criminal prosecution.

The struggle of Tsarist officials with *manaps* was mostly unsuccessful, but that is not to say that half a century of Russian rule resulted in little change. From Shabdan's adoption of the Tsarist symbols of power, such as medals and a kaftan with a shoulder loop, to the forced accommodation of peasant settlers, the imperial presence reshaped the native society in many ways. The irony of the officials' hostility to *manaps* is that, as Akiyama demonstrates, the rise of *manaps* as a de-facto aristocracy and "feudal lords" in a society where no hereditary aristocracy existed before the conquest was largely due to the conscious decision of the imperial government to elevate certain *manaps* as intermediaries and representatives of the Kyrgyz.

An equally significant, though inadvertent, effect of colonial rule was the development of national consciousness that transcended tribal divisions, and it is here that the book makes its key contribution to the discipline. Drawing on a number of native-language sources, Akiyama convincingly argues that Shabdan acted as a conduit of national identity. Furthermore, the national consciousness that Shabdan and other manaps helped shape was "generated through Islamic engagement." As Akiyama explains, the sense of national unity elaborated in the literary works and the first native history of the Kyrgyz commissioned and sponsored by Shabdan was equally a response to the growing pressure on *manaps* to maintain authority and a consequence of exposure to ethnic diversity in Mecca and other centers of Islamic worship and learning. Neither would be possible without the ban on traditional activities that formed the base of *manaps*' authority and the construction of a railway connecting the region with Muslim provinces of Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Akiyama's work thus offers a well-argued alternative to the common notion that the development of nationalism in imperial peripheries was driven by European-educated secular elites.

Just as importantly, Akiyama's book opens up new avenues for comparative research within the region. What explains the diverging paths of national identity formation among the culturally and linguistically close Kyrgyz and Kazakhs? What made the traditional elites, *manaps*, the forerunners of nationalism among the Kyrgyz when the Kazakh national identity was shaped mainly by Russian-educated intellectuals? The book also raises new questions regarding the changing practices of the previously pastoralist economy. Is it possible to view *manaps* as native agents of modernization in light of the growing network of businesses owned by Shabdan's family and the construction of a Jadid school funded by Shabdan himself? By extension, do *manaps*' wealth and social capital explain their enduring authority among the Kyrgyz despite the efforts of the colonial authorities to undermine them?

While it is one of very few biographical studies among the English-language works on Central Asia, this monograph is not a traditional biography. Instead, Akiyama uses the microhistory of Shabdan's rise to prominence and his service to the empire as an anchor to write a broader social history of the northern Kyrgyz. The book's great

accomplishment lies in its use of a vast number of native sources—from recorded oral histories to archival and published materials—to tell the story of Shabdan. This contrasts markedly with the majority of recent monographs on the history of the region, which rely mainly on colonial documentation in Russian. In the final analysis, Akiyama's thorough examination of a native leader's place in the colonial edifice of the Russian Empire is a welcome addition to the academic literature on the history of Russian imperialism in Central Asia and one that would find eager readership in Central Asian academic circles if translated into Russian.

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